

Winter 2009

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Martha C. Jenkins

Western Kentucky University, martha.jenkins@wku.edu

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Recommended Citation

Jenkins, Martha C.. (2009). Giving as a Way of Life: Its Benefits, Not Its Costs. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 101 (1), 16-17.

Original Publication URL: www.aafcs.org

Available at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/family_fac_pub/2

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Giving as a Way of Life: Its Benefits, Not Its Costs

Martha C. Jenkins, CFCS

A significant concept in my Christian upbringing and way of life is found in Acts 20: 35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Another formative thought was—to whom much is given, much is expected. As I grew personally and professionally, I was inspired by the Biblical story of Esther and the words of Mordecai, "Who knows whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" and have found this principle applies in my spiritual, family, and professional life. In addition, I have a profound appreciation for Helen Steiner Rice's poem, "Give Lavishly, Live Abundantly," in which we are told "for only what we give away, enriches us from day to day. (See Sidebar.)

The joy and satisfaction I get from helping others is not limited to one group or one type of service. Recently, I completed a reproduction of a Civil War era silk day dress that is being used in interpreting the Civil War in Kentucky for the Kentucky Museum. The reproduction helps preserve the fragile original and still permits thousands who visit the museum to see and better understand this difficult period in our history. The dress, which took over 150 hours to recreate, is a tangible reminder that I can use my skills to benefit others.

No matter what direction my service activities have taken, my greatest joy and satisfaction have been in working with students in organizations promoting service. The one with which I have

worked most closely for more than 40 years is Phi Upsilon Omicron (Phi U), a national honor society for majors in FCS (<http://www.phiu.org/>). As advisor or professional project advisor, I have had the opportunity to model giving as a way of life.

Our work with the national organization, Second Wind Dreams (<http://www.secondwind.org/>), was a first place Phi U award-winning project in 2005-06. We paid the Second Wind Dreams membership fee for a local nursing home so they received all the benefits and literature from the national organization. My students and I visited the residents and completed dream forms to identify their unfulfilled dreams. One of the dreams we fulfilled was for Madelyn whose father had owned a theater when she was a child. She would "take the stage" and sing and dance for an imaginary audience; her dream was to see a theatrical production on stage. The local production of Peter Pan at the Capitol Arts Theater presented the perfect opportunity for Madelyn to again "take the stage." On the day of the performance, we arrived at the nursing home early, gave her a beautiful corsage, and chauffeured her, courtesy of a friend's handicap-equipped van and driver, to the matinee. She was recognized by the emcee at the opening curtain and welcomed with a standing ovation! Although seated in a wheel chair, Madelyn clapped, danced, and sang along to all the songs. The cast of Peter Pan promised to whisk us off to Never Neverland, and Madelyn

was not left behind. Afterward, the cast shared their flowers, embraced Madelyn, and assembled beside her for a group photo—a truly magical moment! For us, granting Madelyn's dream was priceless.

The benefits of giving as a way of life far outweigh any costs that one might incur along the way. There are benefits for individuals and organizations, for the greater community, and for the FCS profession. From various volunteer work such

as the Second Wind Dreams project, there were benefits to me personally, and to my students. The greatest benefit of all is the pride that I feel when students catch the "spirit of giving" and realize the benefits they accrue from helping others.

In the words of Marion Wright Edelman, "Service is the rent we pay for being. It is the very purpose of life, and not something you do in your spare time." *Contact Martha Jenkins at jenkins777@insightbb.com.*

Give Lavishly! Live Abundantly!

*The more you give, the more you get —
The more you laugh, the less you fret —
The more you do unselfishly,
The more you live abundantly.*

*The more of everything you share,
The more you'll always have to spare —
The more you love, the more you'll find
That life is good and friends are kind.
For only what we give away
Enriches us from day to day.*

Helen Steiner Rice